



MARKETPLACE

JOBS | HOMES | CARS | CLASSIFIEDS | DIRECTORIES

[Local News](#) |
 [News](#) |
 [Education](#) |
 [Health](#) |
 [Sports](#) |
 [Entertainment](#) |
 [Lifestyles](#) |
 [Columnists](#) |
 [Lottery](#) |
 [Obits](#) |
 [Opinion](#)

▶ **NorthJersey home**

Search
NorthJersey.com
(last 2 weeks)

[Advanced Search](#)
News

Corzine's senatorial stock has become a solid growth issue

E-mail this story
 Print this story

Sunday, August 24, 2003

By **JOSH GOHLKE**
TRENTON BUREAU

Not long ago, the casual newspaper reader could have been forgiven for thinking Jon Corzine's last name was something like "who spent \$60 million of his own fortune to get elected."

Today the overwhelmingly critical coverage of his 2000 campaign has been replaced by such a streak of good press that the laudatory headlines are strung down the margin of the senator's Web site. In less than three years - a short time in the seniority-driven U.S. Senate - New Jersey's senior senator has put a series of new distinctions ahead of his most dubious one.

The former Goldman Sachs chairman has quickly become known as an active lawmaker with precocious committee assignments, an effective Democratic spokesman on fiscal matters, and a diligent politician exuding quiet charisma during frequent tours around the Garden State.

He has been entrusted with running the Democratic Party's national campaign to retake control of the Senate. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle called him "invaluable." And polls rank him as New Jersey's most popular statewide officeholder.

The senator even emerged in the middle of a summer vacation last



BETH BALBIERZ / THE RECORD

▲ Sen. Jon S. Corzine, who frequently travels around the state, speaking with local politicians at a Superfund site in Roebling this month.

NEWS

NEWS

AP MONEYWIRE

| Index | Last | Change |
|---------|---------|--------|
| Dow | 9312.94 | -35.93 |
| Nasdaq | 1758.39 | -6.93 |
| S&P 500 | 991.09 | -1.97 |

Stock Quote

RESOURCES

- ▶ News special report:
[Back to Baghdad](#)
- ▶ Politics special report:
[Banking on your money](#)
- ▶ 9/11 special report:
[Journey Through Shadow](#)

GUIDES



FUN STUFF

- ▶ [CROSSWORDS](#)
- ▶ [HOROSCOPES](#)
- ▶ [COMICS](#)

NorthJersey.com

- ▶ [Site Map](#)
- ▶ [Help & FAQs](#)
- ▶ [To Advertise](#)
- ▶ [Contact - Internet](#)
- Newspapers**
- ▶ [Subscribe/Services](#)
- ▶ [N.I.E. \(education\)](#)
- ▶ [Contact - Newspapers](#)
- North Jersey Media Group**
- ▶ [www.njmg.com](#)
- ▶ [Partners](#)
- ▶ [GroundZeroSpirit.org](#)
- ▶ [Food Drive](#)

week as one of the prospective buyers who could prevent the New Jersey Nets from defecting to New York. While the idea of a sitting senator owning a National Basketball Association team was not without its critics, the state Assembly's top Republican was among those rooting for Corzine.

In a recent interview, the senator guessed that perceptions of him have shifted because he has simply had time to do the work.

"I think there was a cynic's view that I was doing this as a hobby, or I was doing it for reasons that were for personal gratification," he said of his 2000 campaign. "If nothing else, I think I've convinced people ... that I'm serious about it."

Corzine's ascent in Congress has been speeded partly by a convergence of his own background with the issues of the day. Fellow Senate Democrats have seen him as an ideal spokesman on fiscal issues - one who, for example, can attack President Bush's tax cuts even though he stands to benefit from them personally.

Last year, accounting-reform legislation written by Corzine and Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., was largely incorporated into the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, Congress' landmark response to corporate scandals. Dodd said his colleague had not only the business experience to understand the issues, but a talent for employing it as a senator. "It's not just that he worked on Wall Street and he was so successful, but he has an ability to articulate issues in a public service sense," Dodd said. "A lot of people come from different occupations and professions, and ... when you hear them talking, it's like they're still in the previous job."

Apparently Corzine has adapted better than many observers expected. During a recent week spent shuttling between appearances in New Jersey and then meetings in Washington, the senator seemed more than comfortable in his hectic schedule.

"Today is one of my quieter days," he remarked while hurrying from a committee hearing to cast a vote on a controversial judicial appointment.

Whether questioning Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz about the costs of the Iraq occupation, or Hudson County educators about their school for disabled children, Corzine struck the same even keel. This is perhaps his best attribute - an ability to come off as a sort of un-politician even as he racks up political successes.

Speaking at a symposium on business security at the New Jersey Institute of Technology in Newark last month, Corzine could have been mistaken for a visiting professor. Although discussing one of his pet issues, the need for more counter-terrorism measures at private chemical plants, Corzine was characteristically free of bluster.

By way of closing the talk, he said, "I know there are others who have a

little different view on it, but that's where I'm coming from." Because Corzine advocates more federal oversight of chemical plant security, many of the executives listening to him certainly had views that were "a little different." But the senator's sober delivery played fairly well, prompting one member of the audience to turn to another and say, "He has principles, but he sees both sides."

Corzine's principles align him consistently on the left. Ironically, the group Common Cause lists campaign finance reform at the top of its agenda and gives his voting record a perfect 100 percent rating. So do abortion rights, gun control, and most labor groups, according to Project Vote Smart. He has gotten zeroes or low ratings from most business, tax reform, and right-to-life groups.

Asked about his liberal bent, Corzine said he views his private success as built partly on government and community support - whether it was his experience in the Marine Corps Reserves, his low-cost education at a state university in his native Illinois, or the Wall Street regulations that he sees as beneficial.

"The world we live in is a lot better place when government has a positive, partnership role," he said. "This self-made-man stuff is great, but it ignores the fact that we're all part of something bigger than ourselves."

Corzine lined up to the left of many of his fellow Democrats last fall by opposing the invasion of Iraq. Still, when Wolfowitz and other officials testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last month amid growing concerns about the occupation, Corzine's mild Midwestern manner did not disappear. He was less confrontational than some of his colleagues who had supported the war.

When the administration officials hedged on the likely cost of the occupation, Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr., D-Del., uttered the testy quote that news outlets widely broadcast from the hearing when he demanded: "Give me a break, will you? When are you guys starting to be honest with us?"

Corzine expressed his frustration, too, but his carefully qualified comments fell short of a dramatic sound bite, as they often do.

"The idea," he said, "that we can't come up with a baseline - everyone knows in budgets that you have baselines and extreme outer elements with regard to cost - to not have some idea of where we are going with regard to the cost of this to the American people, so that we can make the judgments about how much we're going to have to make sacrifices here at home, is just, I think, a travesty within the context of how we have to make budget decisions."

Even if it doesn't always fit neatly into news stories, Corzine's understated style serves him well in person. A few hours after the

Foreign Relations hearing, he turned his calm attention to a pair of constituents visiting his Washington office to seek funding for St. Joseph's School for the Blind in Jersey City. Far from showing any of the haste his schedule might require, he seemed as if he might not even get around to wrapping up any given sentence.

"That's actually the fun part of this job," Corzine said afterward. "I like people. It's not hard for me to try to help on something that's not the macro-issue of the day."

David Rebovich, a Rider University political science professor, said Corzine is at his best in such situations.

"He's extremely attentive, well-prepared," Rebovich said. "His real strength is one-on-one."

He noted that Corzine capitalizes on this by being more willing to travel around the state than most U.S. senators. A recent Monday found him making two appearances in North Jersey and then taking a helicopter ride to an event in Cape May.

That will look like practice next to the schedule Corzine faces as chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, the fund-raising arm of the Democratic caucus that recruits and finances Senate candidates. With new campaign finance rules that require the parties to rely more on so-called hard money - that is, smaller contributions from a larger number of donors - the job will be daunting even for someone with Corzine's business contacts.

Corzine assumed the DSCC post in December, as many Democrats were blaming their poor showing in the 2002 midterm elections on the lack of a coherent message. Corzine has said Democrats should be less timid about staking out more distinctly "progressive" positions, and he has shown more interest in developing a policy message than most campaign chairmen, said Jennifer Duffy, who analyzes Senate races for the Cook Political Report.

Unlike the man who recruited him for the Senate and was a predecessor at the DSCC, former Sen. Robert G. Torricelli, Corzine is not known for his love of fund-raising, Duffy said. Indeed, at one time his primary qualification was that he didn't need to raise funds. But his committee has managed to keep pace with Republican fund-raising to date, she said.

"So far, so good," Duffy said. "I think he has taken the job and done what he's supposed to do with it. One of the smart things he did was put together a very smart staff with a lot of institutional experience."

He will need it. Already in the minority, Democrats must defend 19 of their Senate seats in 2004, 10 of them in states that voted for Bush. With the GOP running for 15 of its own seats, the Democrats' best-case scenario may be holding onto their current position, with Republicans

controlling 51 seats, Duffy said.

"He's got a lot to worry about," she said of Corzine. "This is a pretty thankless task. Senators don't beat down the door for this job."

Whether or not Corzine has enough thankless tasks to worry about, his relative popularity has prompted some Trenton talk about his viability in the 2005 gubernatorial election, which would be a year before his Senate term expires. Corzine's approval rating - 48 percent in the most recent poll by Quinnipiac University - leaves room for improvement. But Governor McGreevey's is languishing at 32 percent, a figure widely attributed to a bleak economy and a series of controversies surrounding the governor and those close to him.

Some observers dismiss such speculation for the time being, given the high threshold for toppling a sitting governor. Moreover, Corzine has no obvious reasons to rush out of a Senate seat that, after all, did cost him.



"My sense is no, Corzine did not pay \$65 million to be governor of New Jersey," Rebovich said. Referring to two powerful state unions, the Communications Workers of America and the New Jersey Education Association, he added, "I think he enjoys the legislative role, and his ability to talk policy without appeasing the CWA or the NJEA every day."

Corzine himself said his most useful place for now seems to be in the Senate. He said leading the Democratic campaign has improved his standing in the party and therefore his effectiveness as a senator. Noting that he had just participated in a Democratic leadership meeting, he seemed briefly surprised by how far he had come.

"If I'm able to carry out this senatorial campaign in a successful way, it will be very important for the committees I sit on and my voice in the caucus, which is already more important than it would have been," Corzine said. "I'm actually part of the deal."

E-mail: gohlke@northjersey.com

6417782

 [E-mail this story](#)  [Print this story](#)



Get 50% off The Record or Herald News
Click here to *subscribe today!*

Copyright © 2003 North Jersey Media Group Inc.
[Copyright infringement notice](#)